

2010 Volunteer of the Year

Mike Evans

By Charlee Beasor



Mike Evans is one of those people who can immediately put you at ease. Deeply interested in finding out what makes people tick, Evans listens earnestly when others speak. He says he learned many of those skills from his father, H. Dean Evans,

who served as Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction in the 1980s and early '90s.

“My father had a unique ability to engage people from all walks of life and from many different viewpoints on issues,” Evans recalls. “He was gifted at being able to find the common thread that helped advance what needed to be advanced.”

Evans is president and CEO of CHORUS, Inc., his own strategic development and human capital management business. He has been able to use what he learned from his father, as well as his own passion for people, to work with for-profit companies, non-profit organizations and education entities.

“Being able to get people to appreciate their differences, appreciate their unique circumstances and facilitate appropriate dialogue in rolling up your sleeves and working through (those differences) ... is what then advances the good for everybody. And I think my father had the ability to do that. A lot of it's just kind of in your DNA, the ability to do these types of things,” he observes.

Entrepreneurial knack

A Central Indiana native, Evans graduated from the Indiana University School of Business in Bloomington, where he earned a degree in business economics and public policy. He notes it wasn't his studies alone that gave him the hunger for starting his own company.

“I was a graduate of a program that was outside the university, that ran in tandem with it, called the Indiana Entrepreneurship Academy,” Evans states. “The academy focused on learning the art of entrepreneurship and aspects of it that weren't taught in the classroom. Honestly, that was a life-changing experience for me. It introduced me to the concept of entrepreneurship and emphasized innovation in my mind.”

Evans was offered a job at General Motors following a college internship there and was later recruited to work at Eli Lilly and Company.

“I got the entrepreneurial bite when I was there (at Lilly). I left and helped start a company called the Dodson Group; we were a marketing and sales firm for office products and services. I had a great ride; I really enjoyed the time there,” Evans shares.

In 1996, Evans sold his interest in the Dodson Group to develop the concept for his current business venture, which launched in 1997.

“We wanted to start a strategic human capital management firm which focused on helping emerging companies and organizations accomplish their vision and their mission through the people, through the human capital,” he describes.

He used his background in music as inspiration for the name. Evans spent two years as a cast member of the traveling music education group Up With People following his high school graduation.

“Choruses in the Elizabethan and Greek eras were used to announce the play, to moderate the play and to bring closure to the play. That's what we do in terms of facilitating strategic dialogue for companies and organizations,” he explains. “The choruses were used to provide support to the lead actor on stage. That's what we do with senior leadership and with board leadership – we provide support to their efforts and what they're trying to do strategically.”

Mike Evans teams with CHORUS Operations Manager Kim Mendez in the company's downtown Indianapolis office.



Continued on page 56

Mike Evans

Continued from page 50

Community commitment

Running parallel to his business dedication is a personal responsibility he feels toward the community. Of the many commitments Evans has, working with at-risk youth and faith-based groups are among the top, as well as striving to improve race relations. In addition to the various foundation boards Evans has served on, he was appointed by former Mayor Stephen Goldsmith to the Indianapolis Commission on African-American Males, a group that examines the conditions facing young black males and develops strategies to enhance the quality of their lives.

"I really have a passion for urban communities and inner-city environments, and I'm very involved with race relations entities," he says. "There were only a few of us (on the commission) that were not African-American, and that was a real passion of mine."

Developing a vision

A member of the Indiana Chamber board of directors since 2001, Evans has been active on a number of committees. He's also been working with the Chamber through CHORUS to develop a strategic plan for the future of the organization.

"The Chamber has given me the statewide focus and a greater



Evans and colleagues are focused on helping organizations and their employees realize their full potential.

appreciation for the environment we need to have a healthy, thriving economy that translates back into individual prosperity for people all across the state," Evans notes. "It's something we definitely need, and we have a lot of room for growth."

Chamber President Kevin Brinegar says the amount of time and effort Evans devotes to the Chamber is remarkable.

"He's been very thorough, very professional and always upbeat. I've never seen Mike not have a smile on his face. Through this (strategic planning) process, he is doing and has done a tremendous service to the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, its board and its members," Brinegar contends. "As evidence of his pouring himself into this work for the Chamber, we



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frequently get very late night e-mail messages and materials from Mike on next steps and materials for the next meeting. We've kind of had a joke that we have a pool whether his next e-mail would come before midnight or after midnight."

All kidding aside, Brinegar says the decision to name Evans a Volunteer of the Year was a serious one.

"I really want to underscore his being named one of our volunteer leaders of the year. He has provided tremendous volunteer service to the Chamber this year with his ongoing participation and activities as a board member, but especially with the commitment of time and energy and effort and passion that he's brought to the strategic planning process," Brinegar asserts.

Evans says being part of the Chamber has given him a chance to use his passions and experience on a larger scale, "Having worked with the strategic plan has been neat because it allows you to tie that all together. It's been a great experience to go out into the state and meet with both our internal and external stakeholders ... and to really gain more insight as to the value the Chamber brings, but also the critical role it plays at a statewide level."